

Grand Ditch
Baker Creek to LaPoudre Pass Creek
Rocky Mountain National Park
Grand Lake Vicinity
Grand County
Colorado

HAER No. CO-32

HAER
COLO
25-GR.LK.V,
2-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD
Rocky Mountain Regional Office
National Park Service
P.O. Box 25287
Denver, Colorado 80225-0287

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I. INTRODUCTION

Location: Baker Creek to La Poudre Pass Creek,
Rocky Mountain National Park, Grand Lake
vicinity, Grand County, Colorado

Quads: Fall River Pass
Mount Richthofen
Bowen Mountain

UTM by Point: ZONE 13
E 422155 N 4409115
E 430370 N 4480825
E 429925 N 4478745
E 428195 N 4479165

Dates Constructed: c. 1890 to 1936

Present Owner: Rocky Mountain National Park
National Park Service

Present Use: The Grand Ditch is presently used for
its original purpose of diverting water
from the Colorado River drainage on the
western side of the Continental Divide
to the eastern plains, where it is used
for municipal water supply and
agricultural irrigation.

Significance: The Grand Ditch is the largest and most
important water diversion project
undertaken in northern Colorado during
the late nineteenth and early twentieth
centuries. The ditch's appearance has
probably remained the same since the
time of its construction.

Historians: C. & K. McWilliams and John W. Jenkins,
January 1988

II. History

The first Euro-American farmers in Colorado practiced subsistence agriculture. Until 1870, these early farmers grew only enough food to support themselves and the local mining industry. The construction of a railway line in 1870, connecting Denver to the transcontinental railroad in Cheyenne, Wyoming quickly changed Colorado's farming economy from subsistence to commercial. The Denver rail link provided access to national markets for farmers along Colorado's northern Front Range. However, the development of an agricultural market in Colorado and other western states differed from that in the East on one significant issue -- water. While intensive irrigation was the key to success for these Colorado farmers, securing the quantities of water they needed became a problem.

The water that the eastern slope drainages provided was sufficient for subsistence farming, but not for intensive irrigation. The solution to the depletion of the eastern slope's water supply by its farmers was to build ditches diverting water from the western slope of the Continental Divide. Grand Ditch, located in what is now Rocky Mountain National Park, is the largest and most important of these ditches. Begun in 1890, the construction of Grand Ditch spanned forty-six years. This ditch begins on the eastern slope of the Never Summer Range, in the Northwest corner of Rocky Mountain National Park, and discharges into La Poudre Pass Creek at La Poudre Pass.

In 1890, Larimer County Ditch Company diverted water from the western slope through Bennett Ditch, which was incorporated into Grand Ditch. For the next thirty years, laborers periodically worked on digging the ten-foot wide ditch by hand. A year after construction on Grand ditch began, the Larimer County Ditch Company was incorporated into the Water Supply and Storage Company. This new company operated out of Fort Collins, Colorado, and was founded by several of the city's prominent citizens.

In order to ease the strenuous construction of the ditch, several camps were established along the ditch's route, housing its workers. By 1911, construction of Grand Ditch progressed to Mosquito and Opposition Creeks. Over the next twenty years, consolidation, maintenance, and minor improvements to the ditch took place. In the 1930's, construction of Grand Ditch resumed. During this period of construction, workers were aided by heavy machinery, enabling the final stretch of Grand Ditch to be completed in less than six years.

The stockholders of the Water Supply and Storage Company, which still exists today, all farm and reside in the Cache La Poudre River Valley, east of Fort Collins. For the explicit purpose of irrigating 40,000 acres of cropland, this company is allowed to withdraw 524.6 cubic feet per second of water from the Colorado River (originally called the Grand River). Although the exact amount of water fluctuates, approximately 30,000 acre feet of water are annually diverted through Grand Ditch. At the time of this report, the Water Supply and Storage Company had 287 stockholders.

III. Description

Grand Ditch is a 14.3 mile long ditch that was created and still is used as a water diversion project. It is about ten feet wide and carries water from the Colorado River drainage on the western side of the Continental Divide to the arid eastern slope of Colorado via the Cache La Poudre River.

The beginning of Grand Ditch is at Baker Creek on the eastern slope of the Never Summer Range. From Baker Creek, the ditch takes a short eastern course and then flows in a northeasterly direction to its terminus at La Poudre Pass Creek. As the ditch's course heads northeast, it gathers water from Red Gulch, and a number of creeks: Opposition, Mosquito, Lost, Big Dutch, Middle Dutch, Little Dutch, Sawmill, Lulu, Lady and Bennett. The terrain through which Grand Ditch flows is rocky, with intermittent stands of spruce-fir forest.

To facilitate the construction of Grand Ditch and to house workers, the Water Supply and Storage Company built several camps, whose remains are still visible. From one of these camps, the La Poudre Pass Barn, built in 1892 or 1893, still stands (see photographs CO-32-A-1 through CO-32-A-3). The National Park Service used this barn to shelter horses in later years. A second camp, located about 400 feet west of the ditch, near Lulu creek, was built circa 1898. This camp, which housed workers, sits in a marshy meadow surrounded by a coniferous forest. The nine log cabin ruins of this camp were discovered in 1976. Pieces of slag identify one of these cabins as a blacksmith shop, while a broken range marks another cabin as a cook shack. All of these cabins are constructed of either saddle or "V" notched logs. The photographs CO-32-D-1 through CO-32-D-4 depict other camps, #7 and #3.

Grand Ditch is maintained by the Water Supply and Storage Company of Fort Collins, Colorado. Employees of this company utilize a narrow gravel service road, which parallels the ditch for its entire length, for their routine maintenance work.

The Grand Ditch is significant in that it is still used today as the water diversion vehicle for which it was intended. Thus its appearance has probably remained the same since the time of its construction.

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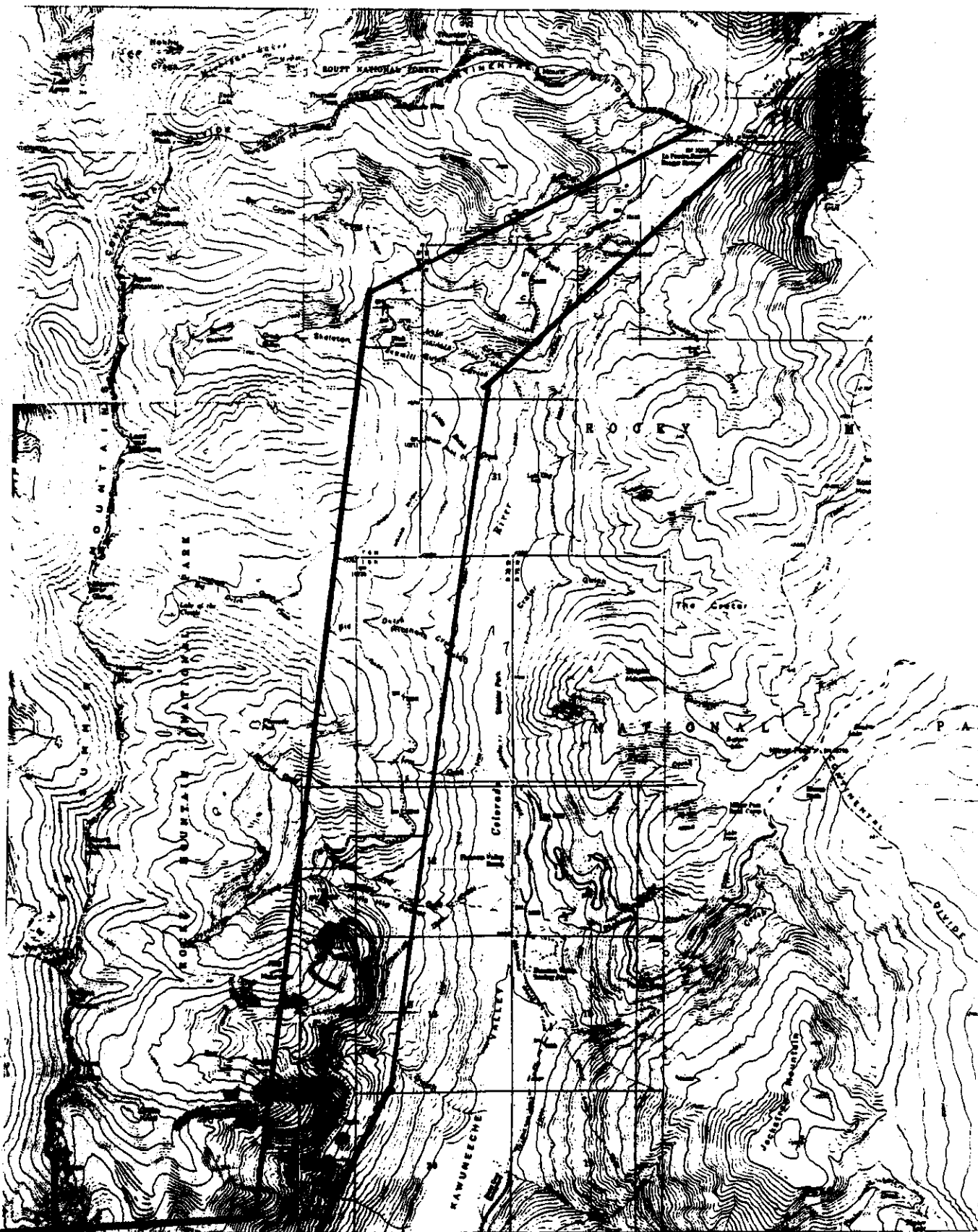
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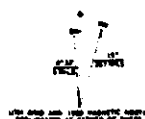
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Taken from parts of Fall River Pass,
Bowen Mountain, and Mount Richthofen
quad maps.

Grand Ditch
HAER No. CO-32
(page 5)



Topographic map and photographs by the Geological Survey
part of the Department of the Interior
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CONTOUR INTERVAL 40 FEET
1" = 1000 FEET

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